

KYMENLAAKSON AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
University of Applied Sciences
International Business/ International Marketing

Nguyen Thu Hang

**APPLICABILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOURISM BUSINESS – CASE
REPOVESI NATIONAL PARK**

Bachelor's Thesis 2010

ABSTRACT

KYMENLAAKSON AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

University of Applied Sciences

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Supervisor Jukka Tyrväinen, Principal Lecturer

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Social media is changing the traditional way of marketing and it has opened up tremendous opportunities for companies. The purpose of this research is to explain why small tourism enterprises should use social media and how they gain the benefits from it. The theoretical framework of the thesis aims to provide readers general understanding of social media and its impacts on the customers' behaviour.

The qualitative research consists of focus group and an in-depth interview used in this study in order to examine the use of social media in tourism under perspective of individual users and of a specialist. The focus group is discussed with reference to three main aspects: awareness of social media, use of social media in tourism and recommendations for a Facebook site. The interview is categorised into four themes of social media in small tourism businesses, advantages and disadvantages, target customers of social media and recommendations for social media site of a tourism company. The research findings of the study are to propose important suggestions for Repovesi National Park in leveraging social media as a part of its marketing strategy.

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PART I: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

1 INTRODUCTION

The bloom of Internet in the last two decades opened up the new era of digital economy. Its fast spreading has a huge meaning in the socio-economics. Internet represents the new economy where companies are able to get in touch with customers in effective way. Marketers are those who gain most advantages from the power of Internet for its low-cost advertising and commerce (Wikipedia 2010).

The people's life changes into global with the invention of World Wide Web. It was invented by Tim Berners-Lee – a British engineer and computer scientist in the 1980s, who created the computer language so-called “hypertext” that facilitated the exchange of text and graphic images as well as allowed the immediate link to any items on the Internet. World Wide Web was initially introduced as a simple Web browser. The revolution continued with the Mosaic – the first distributed graphic browser for the World Wide Web that was considered software to expose the World Wide Web and the Internet to the roomy number of audience in 1991. After three years, Marc Andreessen developed the popular browser namely Netscape Navigator. The dramatic improvement came along with the launching of Microsoft's own browser is Internet Explorer. It opened the age of computer network (Trinkle & Merriman 2006).

That is how the Web 1.0 is created and making a significant shift to Web 2.0. If the Web 1.0 is one-way communication that provides the “read-only” information for the users then Web 2.0 stimulates users having interactive connections, getting involved and being part of the communication.

Companies have realized how tremendous opportunities lie for them in exploiting the Internet for their marketing strategies. People now switch from “bricks and mortar” to “clicks” economy. The traditional marketing tends to be less dominating and changing to the internet marketing; offline advertising is changing to online advertising (Shuen 2008).

Coming together with the Web 2.0 phenomenon, the birth of social media is busted out in new marketing era. It is becoming a hot topic for its huge influences. The existence of social media earns the attention of people by making them from being “passive consumers to active producers” in terms of sharing and contributing via networks (Anderson 2008, 63).

That is explanation why most companies today are thinking of applying social media into their business. Its advantages to and effects on organizations, however, have not been recognized accurately in comparison with other marketing tools.

Using social media as a marketing tool in tourism industry adds profound value to the new media trend. How tourism companies gain the benefits from social media is a worthy phenomenon to be researched.

This thesis was initiated on behalf of Kouvola Innovation Oy in Kouvola, Finland who helps to develop and promote tourism entrepreneurs in the region and in charge of tourism marketing as one of the company’s key services. Kouvola Innovation Oy is interested in studying social media effects on small tourism companies with suggestion of using its business partner Repovesi National Park in Kouvola as a research case.

1.1. Research questions

This thesis attempts to study the main influences of social media on the tourism industry in Kouvola. The thesis also aims to define appropriately

opportunity for Repovesi National Park in using social media in order to expand the awareness of visitors.

The question for this research problem is why social media should be harnessed in small tourism businesses?

In order to answer the above questions, there are following sub-questions arising:

- How do the social media make significant changes to small tourism enterprises?
- What are the opportunities for Repovesi National Park in applying social media as effective marketing tool?

1.2. Objectives of thesis

The objective of the thesis is to get an insight of social media as marketing tool and how it makes significant changes to small tourism enterprises in Kouvola. The study aims to analyze why small businesses gain advantages from social media when building up their image, especially the shift from mass media to social media in marketing is explained.

The goal in the end is to study the opportunities for Repovesi National Park through of social media for expanding the target group's awareness. Moreover, the purpose of this study is to provide recommendations for the Repovesi National Park in using social media as one of their marketing strategies.

1.3. Content of thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is introduction representing elementary information related to the thesis research. Chapters 2 and 3 contain the theoretical analysis and chapters

4, 5 and 6 are the empirical part of thesis. The conclusion of the thesis is in chapter 7.

The purpose of chapter 1 is to introduce the subject of the thesis by describing basic steps of research. The aim of the thesis, research questions, content and structure of the thesis and its usage are mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review, of which the first subchapter introduces the fundamentals of marketing and the development of social media. Sub-chapter 2 gives the readers ideas of how service marketing is different from marketing of tangible goods. Finally, the subchapter 3 follows with the explanation of concepts involving to social media.

In chapter 3, social media landscape is outlined by presenting different social media platforms in detail and their function in marketing. This chapter also analyses key frameworks for the literature review, and two models of theory are discussed to study the influences of social media on online customers' behaviour. The reasons behind the leverage of social media in small business are provided in this chapter.

The empirical analysis of the thesis starts with chapter 4, concentrating on the methodology used in the thesis. Chapter 5 discusses the findings received from focus group and in-depth interview.

The chapter 6 provides recommendations for Repovesi National Park in using social media and other marketing-related suggestions.

Finally, in the chapter 7 are conclusions obtained from the study.

1.4. Usage

The utility of this thesis is to give an understanding of social media under business perspectives. It is hoped to be useful for those who are

interested in social media in marketing, especially for small entrepreneurs in tourism industry. The thesis moreover is to help seeking out the chances for the nature tourism companies to achieve the awareness from their customers. The study could be of use for Repovesi National Park who is desire to exploit this new tool into their marketing strategy. And the thesis attempts to give the practical suggestions for applying social media in Repovesi National Park who may gain competitive advantage for their core business.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Marketing fundamentals and the evolution of social media

Marketing is considered as the most important activity because it affects directly successful operation of business including vitally raising awareness, producing sales and profitability. Marketing is defined as “a process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return” (Kotler & Amstrong 2010). It means that marketing helps the business to define what customers want to produce right products and bring them to customers in critical time. By that way, it keeps the business stay competitive in tough markets. (Mind Tools n.d.)

In order to achieve those objectives and be well-linked with customers, an approach of marketing mix 4 P's is developed which traditionally includes four main elements of product, price, promotion and place. The marketing mix 4P's has been, however, improved over the years. There is a demand to expand the marketing mix when applying it in the marketing of services. This has been explained by the different characteristics between marketing a product and an intangible service. The new model ensures that other important elements of services marketing are not underestimated. Besides the four main elements, the three extra added are people, processes and customer service. With the expanded marketing mix, it is able to cover most of marketing services

situations. (McDonald & Payne 1996, 17) Customers are happy with the way they are treated by the suppliers through traditional marketing.

Then along came the internet and growing rapidly. Unlike the traditional marketing of mass media, internet broadens the scope of marketing in wider range of audiences. It overcomes the limitations of geography and time zones to send the marketing message very fast to target segments. In today's life, when customers are no longer being passive in access of information, the use of social media creates opportunities for both businesses and individuals to find their new audiences. Customers become more communicative and better in control than ever. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 19) The changes of marketing are mentioned in the figure 1 as below.

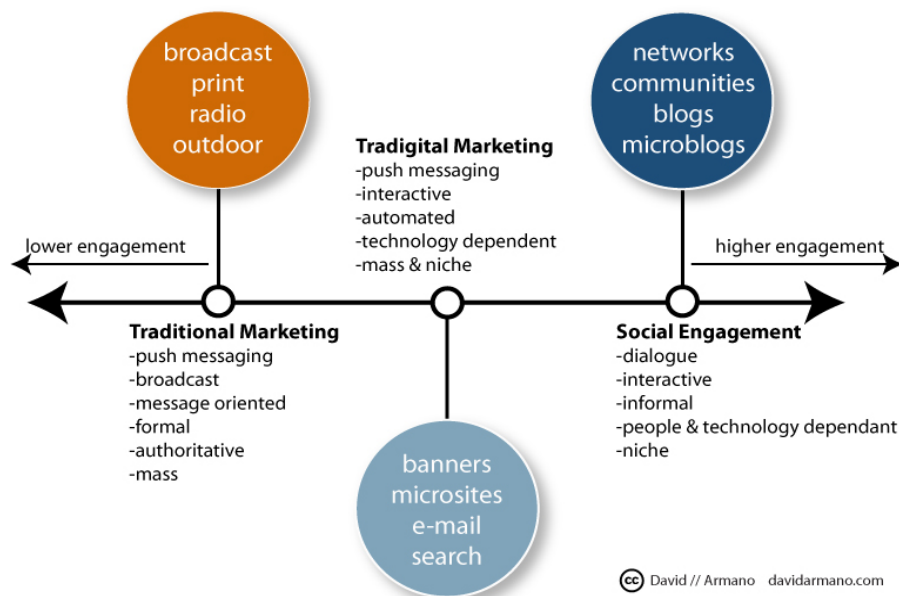


Figure 1. Social engagement spectrum (Armano 2009)

Through the social engagement spectrum showed in figure 1, we can see that marketing is experiencing a profound shift from lower engagement to higher engagement level. If the traditional marketing and tradigital marketing are 'push', then it becomes 'pull' with social media nowadays. Even tradigital marketing is more interactive with users but it

is lacks engagement of customers whereas social media empowers customers to participate in the online community by using social networking sites, for example. It does not mean anymore the technology only but social engagement with people has become a core factor. Thus with higher engagement, it leads to an increase in demand of niche markets, creates new opportunities in the emerging marketplace. (Anderson 2008, 57)

2.2. Services marketing

The nature of services marketing is different from the marketing of goods because there are distinguishing attributes between services and goods.

Firstly, service is intangible. The value of a product can be evaluated by the physical senses such as appearance, taste or smell, whereas the value of a service can only be examined after purchasing and consuming it. Therefore, the purchase of a service requires higher level of trust than a product (McDonald & Payne 1997, 7). The intangibility of a service has involved in the important part of marketing. According to this feature, marketing strategy should pay more attention to the physical evidence of service.

The physical evidence is defined as tangible evidence of the service's nature. For example, a holiday brochure can give pictorial impression for customers of hotels or food serving which they get for what they had paid. The physical evidence is in a number of forms. They can be the tidy appearance of staff or a clean and bright environment used in a service outlet in which help to persuade the customers making a purchase (Palmer 2005, 13).

Secondly, a service is inseparable. The production and consumption process of a service are considered to be indiscrete. Mutually, the producer and consumer are required to interact in order to achieve the

outcome of services. For example, a flight cannot be operated without the presence of passengers. Thus, in services, marketing is a means of facilitating producer-consumer interaction. (Palmer 2005, 18)

Thirdly, service quality is considered having variability. Because the customers usually get involved in the manufacture process, the quality standards of a service cannot be guaranteed. There are two aspects of service variability mentioned as below:

1. *The extent to which production standards vary from a norm, both in terms of outcomes and of production processes.*
2. *The extent to which a service can deliberately be varied to meet the specific needs of individual customers.*

(Palmer 2005, 21)

The variability may bring the problems for brand-building in services compared to tangible goods when the standard of service quality fails to meet the expectations of customers.

Fourthly, a service is perishable. It cannot be stored on a shelf like a product and be unable to use after a certain period. For example an airline offer seats for the passengers on a 12.30 am flight cannot sell empty seats once the flight has left. (McDonald & Payne 1997, 7)

Finally, there is no ownership for a service due to its attributes of intangibility and perishability. A service therefore cannot be protected by patent as is the case with goods. It has implications on setting up a distribution channels. The most common is direct distribution in which intermediaries act as a co-producer with service provider. (Palmer 2005, 24)

2.3. Concepts explanation

In this thesis' sector to understand the meaning of social media and its impact on marketing, definitions and related concepts are introduced as following.

2.3.1. Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is defined as:

a set of economic, social, and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet—a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects (Musser & O' Reilly 2006, 4).

Goossen (2008) in an interview with Klein suggested the key concepts of Web 2.0 are the harnessing of social networking, collective intelligence. It more concentrates on the data collected through computers rather than its own technological factor (Klein 2008).

Reid (2007) claimed in his article of BBC News that Web 2.0 allowed you to leverage the resources of people. It shows the appreciation to the work of amateurs over experts and gain people's involvement in generating something worthwhile.

2.3.2. Social media

The phenomenon of social media is being discussed along with Web 2.0. Interaction in the Web 2.0 is social and we play as social creatures. All activities in our life like we study at schools, work in the companies or go to eat in restaurants, then social interaction with other people is created. That the things we like or dislike it still happens. In the case, we interact with other people in the social settings with something in common, and then the social phenomenon occurs. The reason is when people start sharing interests with others; they share their opinions and

receive recommendations from others. The exchange of ideas, opinions and recommendations in social settings between like-minded people pave the basis of social media (Borges 2009, 38).

According to research of Universal Mccann (2008), social media are online applications, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interaction, collaboration and the sharing of content. Zarrella (2010) argued that social media are new web technologies which have facilitated everyone to create and distribute their own content. Social media definition of Wikipedia (2010) is 'a term used to describe the type of media that is based on conversation and interaction between people online'.

There are many suggestions for the definition of social media due to its broad sphere of the term, but the word 'social media' reveals the meaning how people interact and engage in two-way communication through internet.

2.3.3. Social media marketing

Nowadays, Internet has become social. Thus people are surfing websites, having peer-to-peer conversation, tracking on what their friends or others who shares the similar interests with them found relevant, purchase, commented on and spread the information. For instance, some websites such as Facebook or MySpace enable people easily to communicate and 'buzz'. It helps to unify individuals to be community under common interests. That is one of the effects of social media influences.

The social media marketing is exploited increasingly in comparison with traditional marketing. To savvy how it makes profound change in marketing nowadays, it is necessary to understand the definition.

Social media marketing has been suggested definitions such as below:

The term 'social media marketing' has been linked to the 'social media optimization' in today's perspective. It was initially coined in 2006 by Robit Bhargava, a senior vice president, strategy and marketing of Ogilvy 360 Digital Influence. He explained that the concept of social media marketing means optimizing the site in which the written content garners links which act as trust endorsement in purpose of listening to what community often do and responding in kind. Social media marketing helps to boost up the brand awareness and raise the visibility of product or services in the targeted customers' view (Weinberg 2009, 4).

In addition, social media is defined as:

a process that empowers individuals to promote their websites, products or services through online social channels and to communicate with and tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional advertising channels (Weinberg 2009).

In the same stream of thoughts, Dunn (2007) has stated that social media marketing is a method of promoting brand by strengthening the presence's coverage of your products or services across variety of social media networks such as Facebook, MySpace, Digg.

Under viewpoint of social media marketers, social media marketing refers to the finding of a useful piece of content and then promoting through social sphere of Internet with the vast of audience- reaching. Social media marketing is not only an added-value element to search engine marketing but also to word-of-mouth marketing. It shows more than searching but spreads as well.

2.3.4. Social media optimization

Social media optimization (SMO) consists of more narrowly defined activity than social media marketing. Varagic (2008) in reporting Bhargava's study, described social media optimization as a process of optimizing one's sites/ blogs to be higher presence in social media searches and sites, more easily linked by other sites and more frequently discussed online in blogosphere and other social media.

When adding compelling and fresh content with the integration of social networking sites, a website will get the attention of the audiences and achieve top ranking with broad visibility in search engines (Advanced Media Productions 2010).

2.4. Word-of-mouth marketing and the connection with social media

Word-of-mouth firstly is explained as the act of providing and spreading information from one customer to other customers about products and services. Word-of-mouth Marketing Association (2010) presents a detailed concept of word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM): it gives people a reason to talk about the advertiser's products and makes that conversation take place at ease.

According to Sernovitz (2009), the substance of word-of-mouth marketing is consumer-to-consumer (C-to-C) marketing because it gets people involved in talking to each other about products or services which they are interested in, instead of marketers directly doing that. More accurately, it is business-to-consumer-to-consumer (B-to-C-to-C) because when marketers pull out one idea of marketing new product or service of the company that catch the attention of customers, this first stage is business-to-customer approach. The next stage is when customers start talking and sharing their information of that new product or service, it is called 'word-of-mouth' from customer-to-customer.

Word-of-mouth marketing has become the fastest growing form of marketing which improves the customer satisfaction through two-way dialog and transparency of communication process. The debut of social media has significantly influenced word-of-mouth marketing and constitutes a new word-of-mouth form.

In order to deepen the understanding of social media marketing and word-of-mouth marketing, a comparison is provided in the Table 1.

Table 1. Word-of-mouth marketing versus social media marketing by Advanced Media Productions

Word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM)	Social media marketing (SMM)
Relies primarily on “influencers” to spread the word.	Spreads by itself through the social web and relies on passing message along from person-to-person.
Requires excellent product or service “influencers” can use, be excited about and pass along.	Message must be outrageous, entertaining or provide exceptional value to attract attention and be passed along.
Generates brand-awareness and sustained website traffic.	Not always relevant to the brand.
Engages customers long-term through the product life-cycle.	Usually generates a short traffic spike.
Online and offline (15 – 20% online).	Online only.

Source: Rijk (2007)

From Table 1 we can see most clearly the differences between the two types of marketing. Word-of-mouth marketing is based on the drastic involvement of user and empowers the 'influencers' who play the role of opinion-making leaders spread the word about your products and services both online and offline whereas social media marketing makes interaction merely online through social media channels.

Word-of-mouth Marketing Association (2010) has suggested different subcategories of word-of-mouth marketing techniques such as buzz marketing, viral marketing, community marketing, grassroots marketing, evangelist marketing, product seeding, influencer marketing, cause marketing, conversation creation, brand blogging and referrals programs. However, in this chapter the two most common types of word of mouth marketing, buzz marketing and viral marketing, will be defined and their connections with social media are discussed as well.

Buzz marketing

Firstly, buzz marketing or 'buzz' is the term used in word-of-mouth marketing which 'captures the attention of consumers and the media to the point where talking about your brand or company becomes entertaining, fascinating, and newsworthy'.

Secondly, the traditional marketing model is the approach of one-way delivered message to customers. It starts with the creation of advertising message of marketers and delivers it to customers while buzz marketing is more than that. The message is also sent to consumers. Then one customer tells to two other friends about the message, and it keeps spreading from those two friends to others. That creates buzz (Hughes 2005).

Finally, there are some benefits of buzz marketing which a company can earn from social networks that shows the link between buzz marketing

and social media. An example is when a message has grasped the attention of consumers and it scatters about products or services. Marketers should concentrate on the positive buzz, lessen the negative ones, and build up brand awareness as much as possible. The valuable keyword should be linked to an important social web or blogosphere so that the company will be ranked on top of the search engines. It helps the consumers know about the brand faster and push up the selling (Li 2010).

Viral marketing

There are various controversies in defining the viral marketing because people cannot separate the concepts of viral marketing and viral advertising. This paper focuses on providing the basis of viral marketing.

Overall, the concept has been defined in the following way:

Viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions (Kirby n.d).

INSEAD Assistant Professor of Marketing, Andrew Stephen, argued that there is no necessity for using experts or brand evangelists in viral marketing. The company needs social people who like to talk and disseminate their marketing message to targeted consumers. Those conversations within networks take place usually offline (Karabell 2009).

Moreover, as suggested by Kotler et al. (2009, p.130) viral marketing is known as an Internet adaption of marketing applying the word-of-mouth. It is the spread of advertising message by one customer among other customers.

The viral marketing is more influencing than engaging. Researchers found out interestingly that the online social interaction between people happens as much as the offline social interaction. For example, every day there are more than 60,000 videos uploaded in YouTube, reaching a vast number of audiences. Being outstanding in such a huge information platform and attracting consumers' visit is not easy. Therefore, you need to bring something remarkable, interesting to catch the online attention of your targeted segments. The participants in such kind of online communication not only join the talk but also actually discuss information with each other. In viral marketing, the company can use the influence of its customers to promote their products or services to potential customers. The influence derives from leader opinions.

By using social networks or any type of social media, marketing message will be 'buzz' and then 'viral' to gain increase in brand awareness or sales revenue, for instance.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

3.1. Different types of social media

In today's consumer's life, social media have reached the position where very fast-evolving growth and its overwhelming coverage in digital media scene have been recognized. More than 70% of companies have already used social media and many are unresisting of social media's increase. Social media is approaching to a large number of active Internet users all the time by its variety of platforms which provoke online customers' interaction, facilitate the content creation and sharing (Bloomberg BusinessWeek 2009).

According to Volpe (n.d.), a vice president marketing of Hubspot, has categorised different platforms of social media into three main types, which are shown in Figure 2 below.

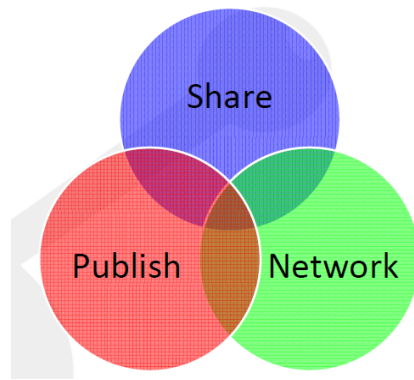


Figure 2. Three types of social media (Volpe, n.d.)

Plenty of debates have occurred determining which platforms are accurate in social media landscape. Most of them do not fit exactly into a single group but are a mixture of different components and social media sites. In figure 2, we can see the fundamental activities of social media falling into three types, which are sharing, publishing and networking. In addition, those kinds of activities are found overlapping each other (Galliford 2008).

From general view to more details, Ryan and Jones (2009, 157-169) have developed a list of social media forms which is based on relatively their primary functions.

Social bookmarking

The main features of social bookmarking sites are to allow users to save, share and organize bookmarks of their favourite web resources such as pages, audio, video. The idea of social bookmarking services is to stimulate the users to manage their bookmarks using tags instead of having them in the browser-based systems of the computer's folders. Now the overall accessibility to bookmarking sites becomes possible. One can share the bookmarks with one's friends, people in one's networks or even to the large audiences outside the list of your saved-links.

On the other hand, those people who are allowed to see specific bookmarks enable to category and rank aggregated-sites according to the user's tags or via search engine tool. (Ryan & Jones 2010, 158)

The examples of some outstanding bookmarking sites are Delicious, StumbleUpon and coRank.

From the perspective of marketing, the social bookmarking site is useful to extend business exposure and traffic. Displaying "Share this" links makes people who come to visit the site and read the articles easily disseminate them to others. One more function is to allow people vote on it. Companies will get more benefits if they actually get engaged in those social bookmarking activities. Moreover, they can gain understanding about what people like and dislike. That helps increasing the spreading coverage of the business and achieving more targeted traffic as the outcome.

The next advantage is to grow the leading role and perceived relevance. The tags of companies' pages set by people who have marked them as their favourite sites can improve search visibility. An article which is voted many times in the shortest time will go rapidly up to the top page in the ranking. From search engines' perspective, this can help companies to earn authority of particular key words and strengthen the business appearance in both online and offline interactive communication. (Ryan & Jones 2010, 158)

Social media submission sites

Social media submission sites are found to be quite similar to social bookmarking sites in function. One difference is that the users not only save the personal bookmarks but also submit and vote on articles, videos and other content works, which enable to tap into broader community. It is important to bear in mind is that the more people vote

for an article, the higher the ranking climbs up. Through social media submission sites, people vote, participate and discuss which sites they find compelling. Based on that the marketer will see how people think and act, in order to foster the traffic in return.

Social media submission sites go to extreme with the coming of Digg, Reddit and some niche sites such as Sphinn, a site of internet marketing; or Socialnews.biz for submission and discussion of business news (Liolios 2008). Social media submission sites are used as an effective way define what people like. When a piece of content comes as first in rank, companies can predict the type of information people find interesting, then find the way to improve their own content to be more appealing.

Moreover, the use of social media submission sites can be leveraged to create 'buzz' around your submitted content. People find pieces of content on companies' site are worthy to be discussed and disseminated; they will become the active participants on those sites' activities. Therefore, companies should take into account the comments and reviews of participants to get an insight into the way people view things.

There are many advantages of social media submission sites such as amplifying the visibility, traffic and online. If a company have the articles or content rise high in those social media submission sites, that company will get a significant traffic and loyal. Besides that, the opportunities for a company to reinforce its profile and a perceived position within online community are at hand. If you keep on with anything relevant and compelling by joining into the submission and online round-table discussion, audiences will start to pay attention to you, trust you and gain perception of your brand or service. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 159)

Media sharing sites

Thanks to the rapid development of technology, social media sharing becomes a very large market which taps into broad range of audiences. Photo sharing sites like Flickr and Yahoo! Photo allow users to create their own photo album, upload, share and leave comment on those photos. Other sites such as YouTube, Y! Video and MSN Soapbox apply the same for internet-video sharing service. Slide hosting services like Slideshare and SlideBoom are sites for uploading, hosting, sharing and commenting on submitted slideshows created with presentation programmes. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 160)

Those media sharing sites exploded into the social media platforms because of their users-friendly and easily accessible benefits. The sites can be set up for public or 'friends' users to share and embed their own content in blog and to encourage people having distribution and discussion around the blog post.

Media sharing sites can provoke unpredicted increasing of content distribution. These sites have significant impact on marketing because the ability of delivering message to large number of audiences is really fast. For example, an update of the most viewed video on YouTube in June 2010 is the music clip of Lady Gaga "Bad Romance" with 217, 720, 898 views (MacManus 2010).

In addition, the purpose of using those sites is for raising the target market. Through other users' uploading and commenting on those media sharing site, companies can gain savvy understanding of customers' likes or dislikes.

Forums and discussion sites

The advent of forums and discussion sites comes at very early in the days of Internet development. Some of most popular discussion boards come up such as Yahoo Groups and Google Groups. Those groups are

created with public or only-member access which allows users to post messages and to discuss within the forum. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 159)

Forum and discussion sites are used for many reasons. Firstly, they are to promote a company profile indirectly. By showing the expertise on some specific sectors, giving appropriate answers or advice to other participants' queries on forums and discussion sites help customers respect the company and thus they want to know more about the business and online reputation of the company.

These sites are also aimed to enable getting in touch with customers; examining what they think, what they are interested in and how they deal with their concerns through the content of discussion on forum. The more a company know about customers, the more successful they get.

A company can make use of forums and discussion sites to spot the negative comments or what people do not like about their business. It helps to reconcile any potential problems. When a company becomes trustworthy member of the community, people who trust their brand will come to defend them.

Reviews and rating sites

Reviews and rating sites allow users to share their experience through reviewing and rating on what they like. Those sites fall into two different types; the only-for-review sites like Reviewcentre, Epinions or RateItAll, and reviews and rating sites; where the review is combined with broader sites including product reviewing, rating and shopping such as Amazon and Bizrate. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 161)

There are some sites which cover reviews on a specific industry such as TripAdvisor focusing on customers' review of travel destinations and go-along services, and RateMyTeachers for rating the teachers' performance and popularity in elementary and secondary schools.

In marketing, reviews and ratings of customers are treated as valuable feedbacks which drive purchase decision. People are more likely to buy products in the site which has product reviews and rating. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 162)

Driving sales is a remarkable power of reviews and ratings sites. People tend to look at products reviews prior purchasing therefore the more positive of your brand reviews, the better sales generate. Thus it can be an indirect way to promote your business.

Social network sites

The purpose of those sites is to allow users participate in a social network by creating their own profile and connecting with friends or other contacts within network or inviting friends and real-world contact to join into the online community. So, there are vast numbers of users engaged in the social network sites. It is an online meeting platform for people for creating the content, sharing them with others, and interacting with the like-minded people easily (Ryan & Jones 2009, 162).

Talking about social network, some popular sites have come up such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and LinkedIn, which attract most attention on the stream of social media marketing.

Social network sites are best places to look for advertising chances based on analyses of users' profile information. Controversies around the benefit of advertising in social network sites still take place. However, it is undeniable that the advertising is trendy on those sites. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 162)

If a company offers customers transparent information and stimulates their interest in products or services, the long-term relationship is created online and offline. The company should keep eyes on customers

and let the influencers within the online community to promote the company's brand.

Blogs

Blogging is no longer a new thing along with the explosion of Internet. It has become one of major communications in the modern media due to its high level of interaction with audiences.

A blog is an online journal where people can publish entries like their own story, local news, opinions, and experiences over things. The content of entries tends to be personal or controversial. The ones who participate in blogosphere are called bloggers. They read the post of others; they leave comments and link to each other's sites. By that way, people create buzz. It supports the online word-of-mouth. From a business perspective, the blog with highest number of page views will be the influencer who has significant impact on other people. (Mayfield 2008, 16)

Blogging brings advantages to traditional media, especially to newspaper. The gap between amateur content publisher and professional journalism has been diminished. News and information make a switch from monopoly of professionals to everyone contributions.

The bloggers who publish the news on blog even faster than the journalist because they are probably inside-out viewers instead of outside-in observers. Therefore, they have broader accessibility to the information and their description might be much lifelikeness (Anderson 2008, 185).

Moreover, bloggers can target the segmentation better than other mass channels like television or newspapers because they are able to upload specific topics. By understanding customers through the information

they really need, companies can approach them in an effective way with lower cost. Due to the very fast transmission of information in the blogland, mistakes or anything wrong published are corrected by the contribution of vast number of bloggers.

Podcasts

Podcasts are audio or video files published and distributed in the internet. Users can subscribe them for their use. Those digital media files are operated by a distributor's server. To keep the updates with the users, the server uses RSS feed (Really Simple Syndication), which alerts subscribers to any changes or any new file uploaded in a website through their homepage or other dominated linked site. One example of podcast portal is iTunes. When a new podcast is posted in the web, it is easy for the subscriber to find and download the music file to their iPod (Mayfield 2008, 21).

Podcasts can be a valuable channel to reach target market. Unlike mass media, this social media platform open the new way for companies to be digital conscious players. Companies can create own podcasting services which provide podcasts to prospect customers. Initially, if customers are less tech-savvy, they prefer to "view now" or "listen now" with nothing to install or register. However, if the customers find the content compelling and right for them, then they will subscribe the company's site. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 166)

Micro-blogging

Micro-blogging is a combination of blogging, instance messaging and social networking. One important trait of micro-blogs is restricting the number of characters which users can post. Even though the content has only short texts, it helps to keep people stay in touch and get up-to-date activities from each other.

Among micro-blog sites, Twitter is emerging as a leading player prior other similar service providers like Jaiku and Pownce. Twitter was experimented in 2006 and it was officially launched in 2007. It is growing dramatically with millions of users access everyday for creating and sharing ideas with others (Twitter 101, n.d). Based on the implicit ideas of SMS text message on phone limit of 160 characters maximum, Twitter allows its users to post the text within limitation of 140 characters. These 140-character texts are so-called tweets and the act of sending other followers a tweet you received is known as retweeting. That is how Twitter works to spread the information.

The key feature, limited text - is a doubt for everyone using Twitter in the beginning; it seems unlikely for effective communication between people. However, with such a short post, people get the feeling of everyone being connected and the communication process streams seamlessly online.

Micro-blogging is efficient in improving customer service. On micro-blogging sites, a company can share the information about products and services very quickly. People can post their opinions, which can be positive comments or complaints. Those are like instant feedback for the company to analyse, resolve any mistakes and to improve customer service managing system (Twitter 101, n.d).

Micro-blogging also adds value to word-of-mouth marketing. The idea of old marketing is sending the marketing message to a group of consumers. The more messages a company send, the higher sales they gain back. Notwithstanding, with a micro-blogging site like Twitter a company can lead the conversation of consumer groups talking about business, sharing their experiences and buzz around the brand.

Wikis

Wikis are websites which empower users to create, edit or contribute content on them in general. Also Wikis are known as a perfect tool for mass collaboration.

The most popular example of Wiki sites is Wikipedia – an online encyclopaedia which found in 2001. It is free for everyone from different backgrounds. The users can be professionals or interested bystanders who wish to make contribution without offset (Anderson 2008, 66).

Wikipedia has become the largest encyclopaedia in the world with more than 3 millions articles in English, reaching the visitors number of 68 million every month. In comparison with Encyclopaedia Britannica – an English encyclopaedia published by experts, Wikipedia has surpassed to be the leader in this field (Wikipedia n.d).

Users, however, wonder about the accuracy and reliability of the information on Wikipedia, which is known for its user-driven content. There is no certain answer for this question. Analyzing the process to produce an encyclopaedia by experts includes the contribution of professional editors, academic writers and peer review before publishing it to everyone. The process must be costly and time-consuming. In contrast, Wikipedia is open for amateur contributors. With numerous visitors everyday it is easy to point out any mistakes occurring. Visitors are able to make the changes immediately of the content without going step by step of the traditional process of creating an encyclopaedia. Wikipedia advocates the amateurism and mass volunteerism which allow individuals become publishers. This is so-called the power of “peer production” (Anderson 2008, 73).

In Wikis, everyone have the right to contribute freely on Wikis to create wisdom collection. This stimulates the collaboration of individuals both internal and external of your organization. There are many talented people who can give creative and fresh ideas which probably benefit the company's business. For example, customers who make the entries

related to product or service can help that company to discover and develop the strategic marketing plan. (Ryan & Jones 2009, 169)

Furthermore, the entries customers create reflecting the knowledge of them on product. Therefore, companies should learn what customers think; transform their thoughts into practical idea and apply into the organization would be beneficial. (Anderson 2008, 65)

3.2. Analysis of key framework

There is a global research project conducted by Universal McCanns to measure consumer usage, attitudes and interests in adopting different social media platforms in the people's lives. The third study Wave 3 was completed in 2008, in which 17 000 internet users were interviewed in 29 countries. The report emphasises the usage of social media among internet users. The result shows people who use the internet every day or every other day are the key leaders of social media. They are influencers or enthusiasts who have effect on vast majority of social media adaptors (Universal McCann 2008).

Another research of the company Rubicon Consulting carried out in United States in 2008 also revealed that enthusiasts of web community do drive the online conversation. The key finding of the survey revealed that about 80% of the user-generated content on the web, including comments and questions, is created by less than 10% of web users. This finding illustrates that the frequent contributors are influencers who create most content on the web and have affected significantly the average customers who normally prefer to watch and listen (Rubicon Consulting , 2008).

Social media and its players bring effects on every aspect of internet. All companies and brands see social media as a way to connect with their consumers, hype their business and integrate them with offline community. Therefore, social media revolution has to be considered for

all advertisers, marketers and content producers as a key tool of their communications (Universal McCann 2008, 76).

3.2.1. Social Technographics ladder

According to the Forrester Research, Li and Bernoff, the two authors of the book *Groundswell*, have advocated a new tool to categorize people into specific groups based on their usage of social technologies. Those groups create the ecosystem which is known as the groundswell. By determining how people act in different subgroups, companies and marketers can develop the appropriate strategies to reach their customers online and influence those in offline community as well (Bernoff, 2008).

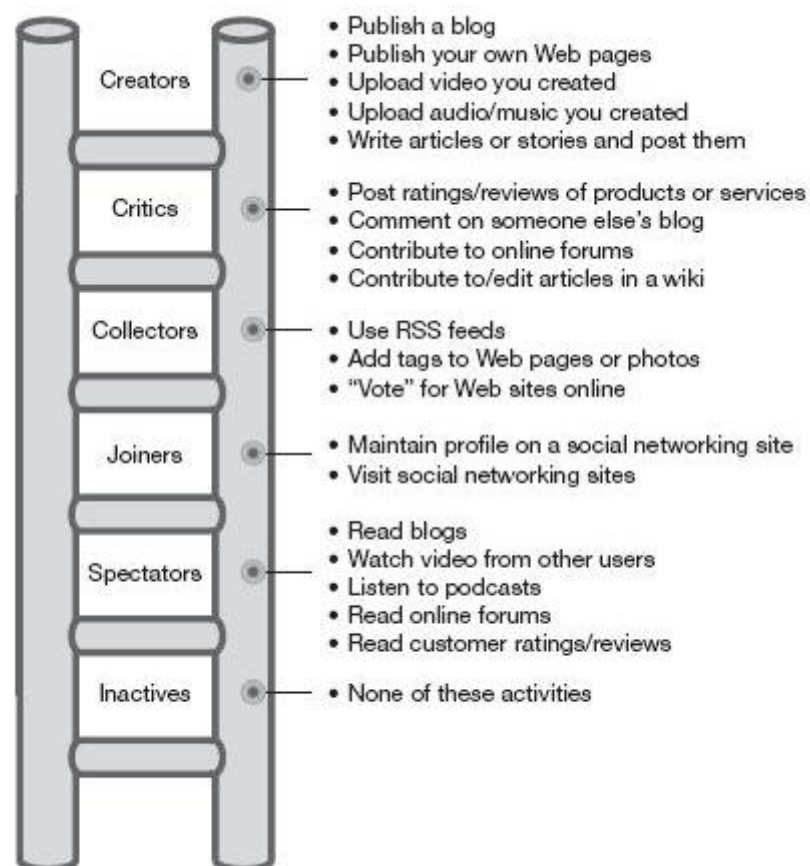


Figure 3. The social technographics ladder (Li & Bernoff, 2008).

As can be seen from figure 3, the social technographics consists of six subgroups are creators, critics, collectors, joiners, spectators and inactives.

‘Creators’ are the most active players in the ecosystem of online community. They engage in publishing a blog, creating their own web pages, uploading video, music or writing articles and posting them to audiences. ‘Critics’ are people who love to share their real experience of products or services by posting ratings or reviews, posting comments on other blogs, taking contribution on online forums and getting engagement with wiki tools. ‘Collectors’ is the next players who are familiar with RSS feeds, online vote and tags of photos and web pages. ‘Joiners’ take action mostly on social networking sites by maintaining and visiting these sites. ‘Spectators’ are the most common users in the landscape who like to read blogs, watch video of other users, read online forums, listen to podcasts and read customer reviews. The final one is ‘inactives’ who are outsiders of those kinds of activities and being silent in the ecosystem (Li & Bernoff, 2008).

In other survey of Foresster Research took place in 2009, there is one extra subgroup which has been added into the social technographics ladder, so-called ‘conversationalists’. It lies in the position between ‘creators’ and ‘critics’. This subgroup describes the growing number of people who regularly update their status or tweet on social networking sites like Tweeter. All different subgroups above can overlap according to the changes of online usage of consumers (Pentin, 2010).

3.2.2. The 90-9-1 Principal

In order to see clearly how people participate in the online community, the theory of 90-9-1 rule is introduced by Jake McKee with the implicit idea is some people make their contribution more than others in the social groups. It is also named as ‘participation inequality’ by Jakob

Nielsen (2006). The meaning is that the ratio of online community's participation always forms a rule look like 90-9-1 ratio.

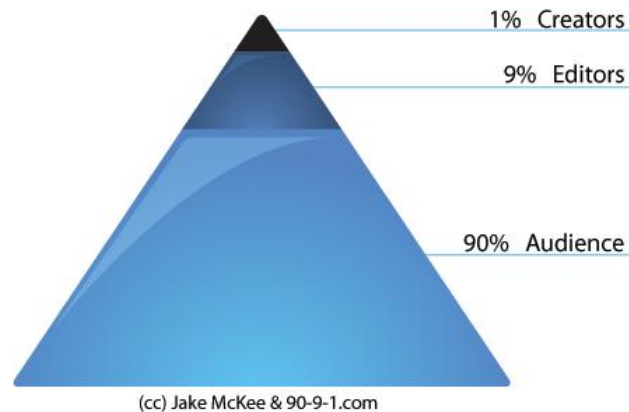


Figure 4. The 90-9-1 principal (90-9-1.com website , n.d.)

As the theory in figure 4 shows, 90 % of users are lurkers or audiences who never contribute in the online social space, 9% are 'editors' who rarely create pieces of content but modify the existing ones and 1% of remainders are 'creators' who take all of actions and be most active of the contribution (90-9-1.com website, n.d.). A quick glance of Wikipedia as example about 50% of Wikipedia edits are done by 0.7% users and 72% of all articles are written by 1.8% of users (Church of the Customer Blog, 2006).

Sometimes, the participant inequality is not 90%, 9%, 1% split, but even it is worse in some cases. Nielsen (2006) claimed that the ratio is more like 95-5-0.1 for the blogs. It means that there is only 0.1 % of users post daily whereas 95% of users do not or rarely take any action in blogosphere (Nielsen 2006).

There is a bit confusing between social technographics ladder and the 90-9-1 principal when determining the contribution of online visitors. However, this is clarified by Bernoff (2008) who identifies the 90-9-1 rule works best for sites and the social technographics ladder is suitable in

terms of population. It is explained why the percentage of 'creators' in Forrester sense is 21% in comparison with about 1% of 'creators' in Jake's rule: the Forrester Research experts measure the number of people who create content in any sites. For example someone can be very enthusiastic in YouTube uploading but enjoy reading customer reviews on Amazon.com, then they are categorized into 'creators' based as social technographics ladder's demonstration. In contrast, according to the 90-9-1 principle, the group of those people will be put into 90% of lurkers' category in the social online space (Bernoff, 2008).

Last but not least is how to maximize the participation of users in business. Companies were asked the question whether there is a way to increase the minority of 1% of active users up to 50% or not. If companies or marketers can drive these power users, they win in the social community. Four main suggestions are provided such as making the contribution of everyone become easy, encouraging people editing existing content instead of creating from blank pages, rewarding users for their participation and identifying both power and potential users (90-9-1.com website, n.d).

3.3. Social media affect consumer's purchasing behaviour

3.3.1. AIDMA and AISAS

In marketing communication, understanding consumer behaviour is a key to make up competitive advantage of companies over their competitors. In order to edge on the consumer's awareness of a product or service, it has to undergo a process of cognitive dissonance which is a complex set of conscious and unconscious perception (Pöntiskoski, 2009). As customers get to know about products or services, there is a process of different stages they are presumed to pass through when they think of making a purchase. However, along with the growing change of Internet and the birth of social media, online consumer

behavior (AISAS) should be different from traditional customer behavior (AIDMA).

With the purpose of increasing the awareness of consumers, AIDMA model is proposed by Roland Hall, an American economist in 1920s which shows a hypothesis on the process of 'consumption behavior'. Figure 5 presents the AIDMA Law.



Figure 5. AIDMA LAW model (Kaneko 2007)

The process of AIDMA Law consists of Attention, Interest, Desire, Memory and Action. This model describes a flow of consumer activities from finding out about a product to making purchasing decision.

Attention: Consumers aware of product through advertising messages.

Interest: They get interested in the product.

Desire: They want to obtain the product.

Memory: They remember the product.

Action: They take action to purchase product.

These activities of process are split into three main stages – Cognitive Stage (Attention), Affect Stage (Interest, Desire, Memory) and Action Stage (Action). (Kaneko 2007). This model applies to consumers' behaviour of people who watch TV advertisement or any other mass media channels rather than their behaviour of shopping at stores.

However, social media has changed the attitudes of consumers towards purchasing-making decision. People now want to obtain the information about product and to share with others. They tend to compare the brands based on opinions of the experienced-users before making a

purchase. It affects the online consumer behaviour. By realizing the change, Dentsu - a Japanese advertising agency - in 2004 developed consumption behaviour model so-called AISAS-Law (Dentsu's Cross Media Communication Web, n.d). The figure 6 shows different stages of the model.

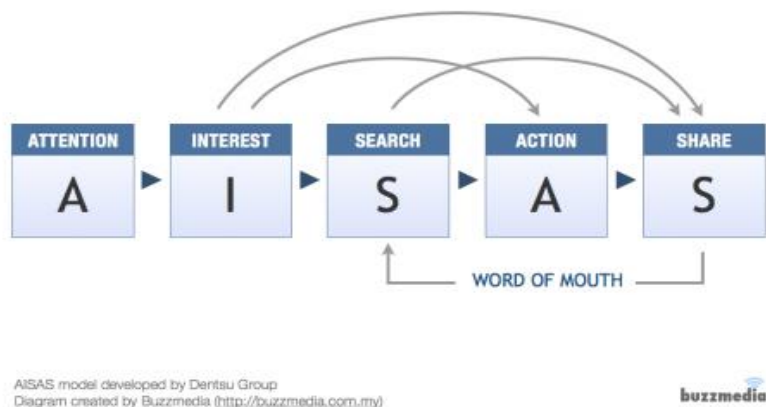


Figure 6. AISAS LAW model (Buzzmedia 2009)

Attention: Consumers aware of product through advertising messages.

Interest: They get interested in the product.

Search: They search the information about product through internet.

Action: They take action to purchase product.

Share: They share the information of product through internet.

From the figure 6, we can see that the most differences between traditional consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour are searching and sharing stages. Instead of receiving marketing message like one-way communication, consumers in today's life are more active for getting to know about what they will buy and what the other people buy. First of all, they tend to find information on the internet about a product before buying it.

Moreover, AISAS Law model explains the efficiency of social media compared with traditional media in marketing. Traditional media helps to

gain the knowledge or awareness of consumers about products or services. However, there are limitations of traditional media in approaching consumers when they consider buying a product. On the other hand, in Share stage social media foster the consumers to share their opinions with friends or like-minded people in the networks about products and to encourage them post reviews, feedbacks or ratings to provide the valuable information back to the Search stage (Social media channel, n.d.).

3.3.2. AISAS model in travel and tourism

Tourism and place marketing earn benefits from the social media. It overcomes the bias of one message fit all but reaching various groups of consumers. The social media makes the shift in consumer behaviour becoming more involvement online as well as getting better outcome in offline. Therefore, in tourism industry analyzing consumers' behaviour according to the AISAS model will help companies to treat their customers in the new way, which focuses on customers to generate better interaction.

An example is discussed to look at the AISAS applying to the choice of a holiday. In the first stage – Attention stage, when advertising message about an overseas holiday catches the eyes of customers, they want to know about this type of holiday service for further awareness. After that, they hold unconscious feeling of wants for the holiday. This psychological state happens in the Interest stage.

When they recognize their needs for the service, they look for the information search through both formal and informal sources. The majority of people will visit websites and travel agencies, though at first they go for some pre-searching of destinations, airplane ticket and hotel price or some other holiday package service which fit with their budget. They even can find out about holiday through advertisements on newspapers or magazines. However, consumers are increasingly

heading to internet for searching what they need. Customers will probably go to google for the information they want to know or some online travel websites such as TripAdvisor or LonelyPlanet. After spending a lot of time for searching, they can narrow down the choice and start comparing between alternatives for the best deal. In order to choose what the best for them, they care more about what other buyers think – their peers who are in the same position as buyers as them. They want to see what their friends or colleagues are interested in. Social media put value into it and allow the customers to track activities of their like-minded people prefer. Now they simply go to their social networking sites and search for the holiday or destination they want to travel. The results pop up on the site like Facebook which shows that their friends also come to the same place they desire to go. The list of itineraries, hotels, tour operator information and recommendation, interestingly enough, is found along in Facebook. Instead of searching for them for hours, customers can save their time for doing other important things but still satisfy their demand for travel information (Qualman 2009, 95).

After having the information, they finally decide to purchase. At the Action stage, customers will return to the travel agent or travel websites to book it. However, it doesn't ensure that customers will come with what they booked to the end. So to avoid they change their mind, the website should be easy to use and accompanied by adding supplementary information as well. That helps to attract more recognition of customers about specific services. Moreover, smoothing action stage keeps the loyal customers and lures prospect customers for sales consideration.

The final stage of the AISAS model is sharing. This important nuance of online consumption behaviour affects significantly to travel and tourism marketing. There is no longer people satisfy with what they found on google but the actual travel experience strongly has influence on their purchase-making decision. They love to share about their reviews on some interesting destinations, some cheap travel tour or some services

for instance. Social media encourages individuals to brag about what they have already tried or got experiences. Companies work in tourism industry should take this into account and let customers talk about your business. They can go to social networking sites to share it with their friends and others within network or they can post reviews, comments or vote for your services. All facilitates people get to know about you, and produce their feedback to provide for the searching stage.

3.4. Leveraging of social media by small businesses

In economic environment, small businesses are seemed to be less ability of competition and of disadvantages in marketing and innovation in refer to others bigger sized-enterprises. To be successful, most of small businesses compete with their competitors by providing creativity and superior services. They also get engaged with their target customers more efficiently by embracing social media, harnessing the knowledge resources for further business development. (Network Solutions 2010)

According to the small business success survey of Network Solutions, carried out at the end of 2009, being creative is the best way to gain competitive advantage of small businesses when quality and low prices bring not-so-remarkable differentiation. Then the important sources for small business owners get the new ideas for innovation and meet the expectation of customers derives from their own customers with 65 percent of respondents. The presence of rapidly growing social media makes small businesses easily tap into the social life of customers and earn benefits from their engagement and connection with customers. (Network Solutions 2010, 4)

Not only successful in keeping existing customers, small businesses are mainly leveraging social media to identify and attract new customers with the low cost. Adoption of social media by small businesses has increased significantly from 12 percent up to 24 percent in the past 12

months. (Fisher 2010) One out of five small business owners (18 percent) are using social media for their business very active through social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or blogs. They grow their interest in different applications of social media as their part of strategy. About 75 percent of the companies surveyed have a company page on a networking site, 69 percent of users have posting status updates or articles on social media sites, nearly 57 percent use social media to build a network, around 54 percent of small businesses exploit social media as monitoring customers' feedback, 39 percent of them spend the time for maintaining a blog or tweeting about some specialistic sectors (26 percent) or using Tweeter as a service channel (16 percent) (see Figure 7) (Network Solutions 2010, 3)

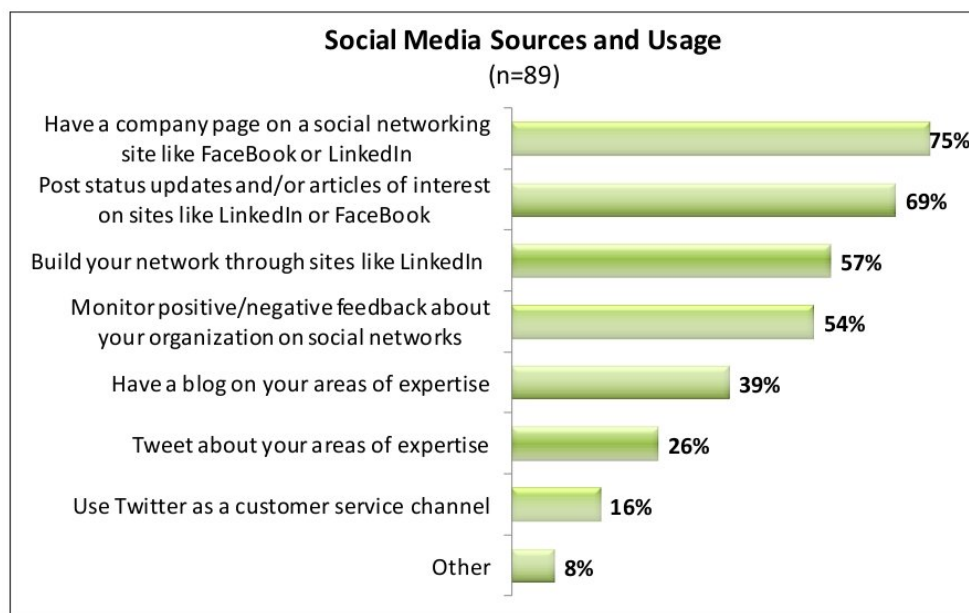


Figure 7. Social media sources and usage (Network Solutions 2010)

Another fact of social media worth mentioning that small business owners claim is that it is time-consuming but less expensive. Most of small businesses, about 57 percent of users, think the usage of social media applications has 'met expectations', 12 percent of users satisfy with the medium because it has so far 'exceeded expectations' and

approximately of 26 percent found it has out of success. (Network Solutions 2010, 6)

Social media is expected by the small businesses to be applicable for marketing and service, including identifying and attracting new customers, increasing brand awareness in target market and staying engaged with customers. Besides the good performance of social media in external marketing, small businesses find it also helps in internal marketing. Social media allows small business owners build up an efficient network linked them with their suppliers, colleagues and staff for better creativity and productivity. The figure 8 provides details of how small businesses use social media and how well they meet the expectations.

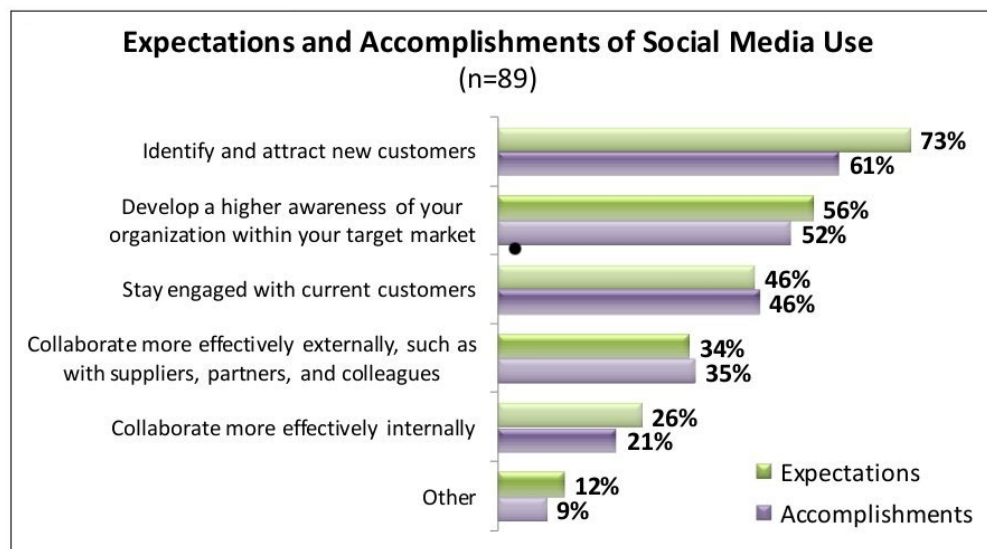


Figure 8. Expectations and accomplishments of social media use (Network Solutions 2010)

From the figure 8 it can be seen easily that the expectations of small businesses of social media catches up the accomplishment of social media use. They are referring to foster the brand awareness and to engage with existing customers. The only expectation of social media use falling behind is identifying and attracting new customers. When 73

percent of users believe to attain more business with new customers but it turns out 61 percent of small businesses achieve the goal at the end. (Network Solutions 2010, 30)

Clearly, social media has become valuable to small businesses. However, it comes along with disadvantages which small business owners feel sometimes hard to handle. The biggest issue is the time-consuming. Half of users claimed that they have used more amount of time involved in social media than they expected. Other issue of social media is to allow people make criticism or subjective judgment on internet. About 17 percent state it as one of their concerns around social media. In related to this percentage, experts think positively as a way to get engage with critics and to encourage marketing and innovation or product development of small businesses. Only 6 percent of users are disappointed by social media for hurting their brand through negative comments instead of strengthening it. Therefore, small businesses should bear in their mind that they would need to spend a lot of time for creating, monitoring and maintaining content of their businesses through social media tool. (Reed 2010)

Moreover, putting your efforts with a very small investment in social media marketing will help to keep your business visible in markets and to generate new opportunities accompanied by reducing your marketing budget. (Fisher 2010) To understand the explosive growth of social media we need to look back how it has evolved under viewpoint of small businesses owners. Approximately 22 percent have found social media bring profits whereas 19 percent express that they lost money for using it and more than half (53 percent) believe social media do pay for itself. However, the landscape becomes positive for next year prediction (see Figure 9). About 45 percent has been led to make money with social media, 39 percent of small businesses lie on the break-even point and only 9 percent cite as losing money. It seems small business owners step by step adjust with this pervasive technology more effectively for

profitable outcome at lower marketing cost. (Network Solutions 2010, 31)

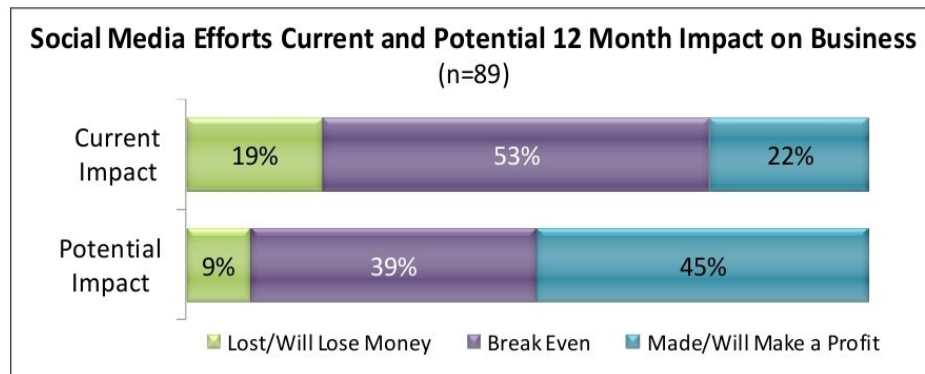


Figure 9. Social media efforts current and potential impact on business (Network Solutions 2010)

In another survey of Social Media Today – an online social community conducted of a sample of 632 respondents who are actively using social media. The study is carried out in 2009 to understand which functions of social media are beneficial in business.

According to the result, four services of LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Blogs have overwhelmed the use of social media tools (see Figure 10). About 79.3 percent of users are using LinkedIn, 77.2 percent of using Facebook, 75.3 percent of using Twitter, the usage of blogs is lag behind with 68 percent of users. Other common social networking site like MySpace used in business only stands for 17.2 percent (Social Media Today n.d.).

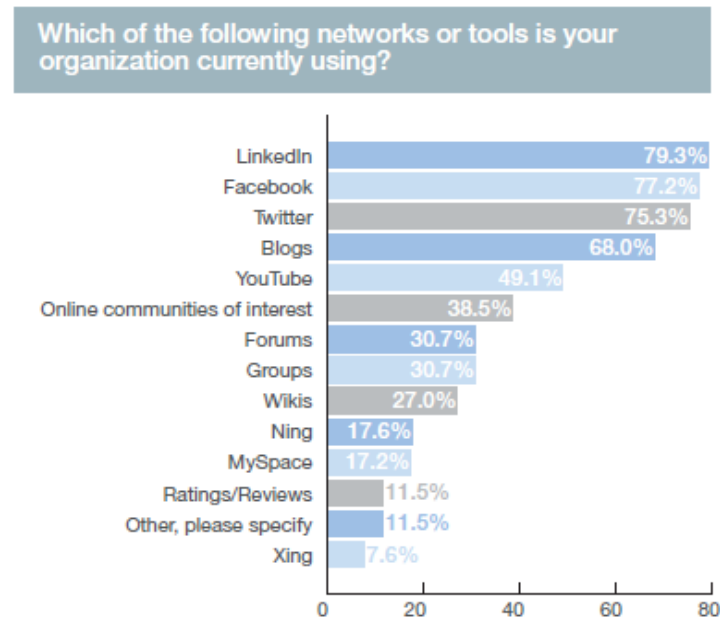


Figure 10. Current social media tools are being used by organizations. (Social Media Today 2009)

Looking for the future of social media tools, then blogs come to the top (18 percent of respondents). Even though, it is underestimated as “old” but businesses find its outreached ability of approaching to mass audiences personally, increasing trust and attracting contribution in online community more effective (see Figure 11). (Social Media Today n.d.)

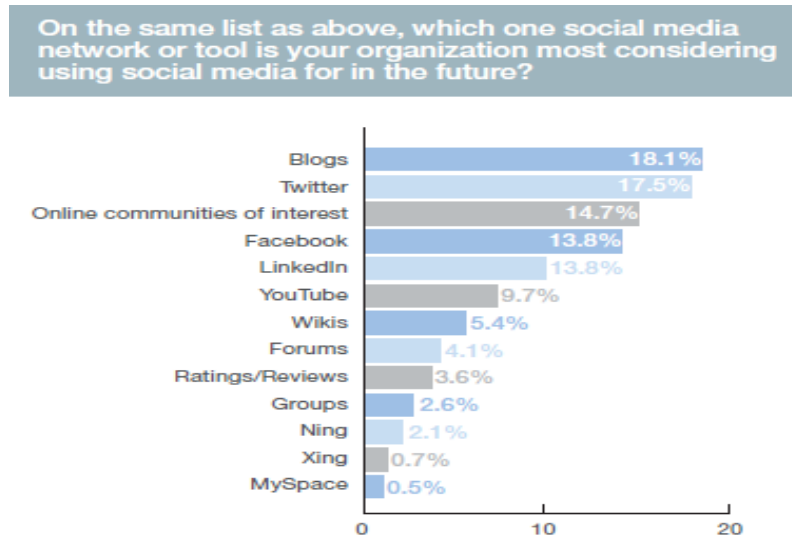


Figure 11. Social media tools is organization most considering using for in the future. (Social Media Tools n.d.)

An important point requiring the concern of companies when harnessing social media is the age and gender of target customers, which that in the study of Hirn and Melto (2009) verified.

The young group from 18 to 24 years old desire to express themselves and want to get attention more than older people. According to Rubicon Consulting, about 50% of most active contributors of the web are in age of 21 or even younger.

The use of social media is relatively different between male and female. While women are more interested in the social feature such as keeping in touch with friends, men are swayed because of discovery and receiving opinions heard by wider audiences. (Hirn & Melto 2009, 26) Understanding the characteristic of target group, companies are able to

select the effective social media tools for using in their business in order to bring most efficient return.

PART II: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

4. RESEARCH METHODS

4.1. A glance at Repovesi National Park

Repovesi National Park is one of most popular hiking destinations in Southern Finland. Repovesi and its adjacent Aarnikotka Forest Nature Reserve were established in 2003 with the area of 15km². This park is characterised by uninhabited forest, a rugged topography with cliffs, bare rock and tens of small lakes. The highest summits of the Kymenlaakso region are in the park inspiring hikers for challenging.

Repovesi National Park is located in the municipalities of Kouvola and Mäntyharju. The park attracts approximately 69 000 visitors a year with its wilderness forest and natural landscape. The Aarnikotka Forest Nature Reserve, the adjacent of the park, is protected by a leading forest industry company – UPM Oy whereas the Nature Reserve area is under authority of Metsähallitus (Selby & Petäjistö 2009).

According Metsähallitus visitor survey about Repovesi National Park, 10-15% of visitors to Repovesi come from Helsinki but mainly visitors of the park are local residents. Even though Repovesi was established in 2003, it receives a greatest number of visitors in comparison with other two parks in Southern Finland are Linnansaari and Seitsemisen (Selby & Petäjistö 2009, 18). The visitors to the park are different in the group size. There are 62% of group two to five persons and only 41% of family group coming to Repovesi as studied-survey. And 12% of all visitor groups are made up remarkably by colleagues. Metthallitus presents that 70% of visitors plan to revisit Repovesi National Park; indeed only about 57% return to visit the park. In the survey, the national park's

authority also reported that the visitors to Repovesi are most dissatisfied with the services among Linnansaari, Seitsemien and Repovesi National Parks. This might be explained by the nature of visitors who are mainly from local towns or municipalities so the demands for local services are not significant or those services have not met the expectation (Selby & Petäjistö 2009). In fact, it is relevant to have the understanding of visitors in order to increase their awareness to local resource. Along with traditional marketing, social media is considerable as a new approach to visitors or potential ones. The expectation of attracting more new visitors coming to Repovesi National Park and recognizing business opportunity through social media is worthy to make a try.

4.2. Methodology

This methodology chapter discusses different approaches used to research and analyze the problem of thesis. Different sub-chapters, reveal the methods utilising theoretical analysis and the empirical analysis of the thesis. The collection of these data and justifications for choosing those kinds of researching approach are mentioned to help the author explore the phenomenon in depth.

4.2.1. Primary research

Primary research is to solve the research problems when secondary data are unable to give the logical and relevant answers. The means of collecting data of primary research consist of observations, experiments, surveys and interviews. (Ghuri & Gronhaug 2005, 102) Primary research holds advantages of profound coherency and consistency towards the research questions. The answers support the further analysis and discussions on the research problems. Nevertheless, it is time-consuming for conducting the research. The capability of approaching the appropriate target groups to conduct the research is not

easy and mainly based on their willingness of collaboration. (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2005, 103)

The purpose of primary research aims to collect the opinions and attitudes of respondents about social media and their usage in tourism businesses. In this thesis, the qualitative method is utilised to study different perspectives on the research problem. The data were collected from focus group and in-depth interview to better understand social media's users and the opinions of a specialist towards the study.

Focus group

Selecting focus group as one of qualitative research methods for the empirical analysis is to examine respondents' awareness of social media, their opinions about the social media's usage in tourism and what they recommend for creating a successful tourism Facebook site.

A discussion was conducted in a group of six people with different professions, age range from 20 to 35 who have visited Repovesi National Park at least once and get engaged in using social media tools for more than a year. The reason to address this focus group is that the respondents had certain knowledge of social media which explore reliably the specific themes. Moreover, their visits to Repovesi National Park come to be relevant in analysing result of the study referring to the national park.

The group discussion started with questions about the awareness of respondents towards social media. Respondents were asked to mention their ideas or knowledge about social media. In order to get the information in details, they were also asked about which social media sites they had engaged and what were their activities like on those sites. The number of times they visit their favourite sites was also mentioned in the focus group.

In the following part of the group discussion questions referring to the usage of social media in tourism businesses were carried out. Respondents in the group were asked to reveal the information they usually want to find on internet before travelling. When it comes to the decision-making, there is a question in doubt the comments or review rating of other friends or someone with similar interest would affect the decision. All the participants in group were asked to share their thought on social media whether they found these tools are effective in use, especially for finding travel information. They were encouraged to reveal the travel websites they had been surfing.

The main focus of group discussion is the recommendations of users for tourism's Facebook site. The objective is to attract more visitors as well as to get higher fanpage added. This question was brought up to understand what kind of information the users want the tourism enterprises to provide. The users' expectation for a successful Facebook page was determined.

The last question for the focus group discussion was about their communication channels where people got to know about Repovesi National Park. The more frequent communication channels used, the more notice should be taken into account as target means.

Finally, the questions of focus group were found in Appendix A.

In-depth interview

The interview method using in this thesis is an email interview. On 3 September 2010, a Director of Tourism was interviewed. She is at present working in Kouvola Innovation Oy. The purpose for this email interview is in order to research the phenomenon more accurately and to reflect the theories in literature review. The knowledge of interviewee in

major of tourism would be significantly necessary in support of thesis research.

The questions were given to interviewee: opinions of specialist on the use of social media in small tourism enterprises, the advantages and disadvantages of social media, the customers target through social media, and recommendations for a social media site of a tourism company.

The in-depth interview questions can be seen in the Appendix B.

4.2.2. Secondary research

The theoretical part of the study was done as a desk research with the sources of information from secondary data. Numerous books, articles, reports and Internet websites were explored to gain a clear view of what exactly social media is and how it works, especially in small businesses.

5. RESULTS

This section of the thesis will analyse the information receiving from qualitative research (focus group and in-depth interview). Because the phenomenon was studied under two different points of view of users and specialist therefore the results would be analysed in separate.

5.1. Focus group result

This sector presents the information collecting from focus group. Participants of the focus group are six people from different backgrounds in age of 20 to 35 and they have visited Repovesi National Park.

5.1.1. Awareness of social media

According to answers of respondents, they were still vague about social media tools and its roles playing in business. Two out of six defined that social media is a tool to connect people without restriction of different geography, to get information and to look for business opportunities (Respondents A & B). Respondent F added social media is useful for marketing because “it can easily and efficiently approach your customers by two-ways communication”. When mentioning social media, networking comes to mind. It allows people to keep contact with friends and new acquaintances, said respondent C. Remainders acknowledged they have no idea of what exactly social media means. Respondent E stated that he was thinking of Wikipedia while Respondent D said Facebook is what she most familiar with.

After giving their general opinions about social media, respondents discussed social media tools or social media networking sites they had used. All of them claimed that they had created account on Facebook. Following is Twitter with two people used (Respondents B & E). Respondent A added YouTube whereas Wikipedia and Baidu (a very popular Chinese site) were brought up in the discussion by respondent F.

One of important matter need to be taken into account was activities of users on social networking sites. Many stated that they do commenting, updating about themselves, uploading pictures to share with others within their network. “I use Facebook to share up-to-date information about myself to my friends. I love writing my message on their wall as well as uploading pictures of mine.” (Respondent D). Others argued that it was time-consuming for doing those things. They seem to be lurkers who prefer reading others’ post and seeing pictures rather than taking actions (Respondent C & E). One mentioned that she often puts the music link on her Facebook site to share it with friends (Respondent A) while respondent B was only one in focus group who taking advantage

of Facebook for purpose of business. She is an owner of small restaurant in the town and she advertised her business on her Facebook site by posting special discounts or new menu conversion (Respondent B). This participant also revealed that she received orders from customers through Facebook site so she should keep her eyes on them by going to Facebook every hour if possible. Others agreed that they go to social networking site for daily-checking (Respondents A, C & E). Only respondent D said she did not have much time to visit the site everyday but normally twice a week.

5.1.2. Use of social media in tourism

First of all, the participants of focus group were asked to discuss what kinds of information they would search in the internet before travelling. According to answerers the general information about travel destination, accommodation and food were most sought out. Price is also one of the factors people do care about (Respondents B & D). Respondent D added she would search for “what to do” and “where to eat” in those places. There is one respondent mentioned about Wikipedia and Google map “...because I go travelling by car so I first pop up to Google map and figure out how to get direction to the destination, Wikipedia does help me a lot either for other information relating to the place”. (Respondent E) Moreover, recommendations of others who had visited the place were also considered to give qualitative and trustful information. “I did pay attention to recommendations of other people who had come to that place before. It meant they had experiences for which accommodation I should rent, what kinds of food I should taste. I also like to see pictures of places they posted on internet “said by respondent F.

Making travel decisions, people were more or less affected by comments or reviews of their friends about places. “When I go travel in a country I usually make decisions based on other ratings for travelling places which get most recommendations would be put in to my

consideration” said by respondent A. Others claimed that it was time-saving without surfing for hours; people can get more relevant information from real-experienced travellers. (Respondent C & F) There was one respondent who said she was not influenced by comments or reviews on social media sites because she made decision where to go so far on her own initiative (Respondent D).

Next, respondents were asked to give their opinions on effectiveness of finding travel information on social media sites, two out of six agreed it was effective. (Respondents A & C) Even it was a good way to search for travel information on social media sites but the information was considered as narrow and subjective (Respondent F). However, users would find something noticeable which they should notice on social media, respondent D stated even in fact she was not relied on information from social media sites. The respondent otherwise suggested to find information from the official social media site of company where participants were interactive in conversation. It would be evaluated as more trustful. Finally, one respondent said travel information on social media sites was unreliable without stating a reason (Respondent B).

There is no specific social media sites people would directly go for surfing. All of respondents said they usually went to Google and typed the key words or what they wanted to find. They would choose to click on those websites that went up as highest ranking on Google searching page. Moreover, respondent C did mention about LonelyPlanet and Wikitravel while respondent E paid attention to information on hotels.com, ebookers.com and edreams.com.

5.1.3. Recommendations for a Facebook site

The highlight of focus group was to gain recommendations of users what should be in a tourism Facebook site to make it more interesting with higher rate of fanpage.

Respondents have slightly different opinions on this matter. Respondent A stated that it was necessary to have a basic introduction of the company in its Facebook site. Other respondents suggested uploading pictures of popular places (Respondents B, D, E and C). Any up-to-date local event or discounts during peak time would be expected to see on Facebook either. "I think the company should suggest travelling tips or particular information such as what should prepare or what kinds of discount would be offered to save time and money. I remembered when I visited a museum in Paris; it took a lot of time for queuing to buy an entrance ticket and because I am a student so I don't need to buy it. It is better if those kinds of information were informed in the beginning. Moreover, the museum is really large and I do not know where should I see first? A map to show "places must see" within museum would be useful in this case" (Respondent C) Information relating to cheap air plane ticket, accommodation near destination with reasonable price and local restaurant were also mentioned.

There are many companies having a Facebook site but not all of them are successful. If the information is rarely updated, it makes users easily forget about the site. Therefore, Facebook would not be suitable for advertising but is rather a social platform where travellers tell about their experiences. Online interaction between users within network by sharing valuable information will make the site more attractive (Respondent F). Besides that, a travel company should take advantage of mutual friends for luring more visitors. "When I see many of my friends joined into a Facebook group, I felt curious and want to become a fanpage of that site. It called effect of online worth-of-mouth". (Respondent E)

Finally, focus group was examined of how they got to know about Repovesi National Park. Four respondents said that their friends suggested this park for them (Respondents A, B, E, F) whereas one stated that a colleague mentioned about the park when she had moved to Kouvola (Respondent D). Other information source came from

brochure of Tourist Office in Kouvola (Respondent B). According to the revelation of respondent C, the information relating to the park was also seen through the Facebook of Orilampi camping site and Repovesi on which her friend joined as a fanpage.

5.2. Interview result

In the interview with a Director of Tourism, the results were analyzed from different aspects as mentioned below.

5.2.1. Social media in small tourism businesses

According to the interviewee, applying social media is quite a new thing for small tourism enterprises in their business. Most of these small enterprises include only one to three persons taking all of business operations. Therefore, new ways of marketing might be a challenge for them. Knowledge, time and capability to use social media are factors should be taken into account. In addition, the use of social media in small tourism businesses depends on firm's target group which is one of the most important elements in marketing.

The interviewee went further by stating that social media can accomplish the traditional marketing. Nowadays more and more people found information on internet and decided to book a hotel after reading many complimentary comments about it for example. Therefore, social media reaches the customers faster and targeted. The interviewee also mentioned three social media sites she suggested to small tourism enterprises are Facebook, YouTube and Tripadvisor.

Furthermore, in a new era of online communication social media has influenced on consumer behaviour. They are empowered more than ever in making purchasing decisions. Social media let people speak out loud their thoughts on something they had interacted with. They turn out to find social content from social media outlets to plan of their travel.

Consumers increasingly read feedback of other travellers and compare the prices of service offering because they felt trustworthy of the peer's opinions. This changes significantly way of business. It means when your company receiving a lot of negative feedback on social media site, then you sure losing your customers.

5.2.2. Advantages and disadvantages

Applying social media in business particularly in small tourism enterprises does bring advantages and disadvantages in use.

The interviewee stated "If a small tourism business has the knowledge and capability of using social media, it will give a cheap way of marketing especially for current and topical things such as offers, events and packages".

She acknowledged social media is very fast in reaching customers with large scale of influence. If a company can realize influencers within the online community and stimulate them to brag about the company's brand then it will certainly earn attention from the customers.

Customer service is mentioned as an advantage of social media. It is very easy to interact with customers through social networking site. Whenever they raise a complaint about your company, you will get back to comfort your customers at anytime without geographical obstacle.

The interviewee also agreed that social media helps in finding out who are leading in the market through their comments on these social platforms. Understanding of competitors can be also examined. Moreover, it is useful to predict the trend of customers on what they like and what they expect from the company.

After giving her opinions about advantages of social media, some drawbacks are given. Social media are considered effective in

approaching customers and spreading information really fast with huge impact. It is one of its advantages but also its disadvantage. If bunch of negative comments arrive to the company's social media site or any misrepresentation is spreading very fast which will definitely ruin the company's image and getting out of control. Because of that, keeping track on customers is required to be implemented. However, it is considered as time-consuming and the results of marketing through social media do not come out after one or two days but taking months or even years. The interviewee stated that when a tourism company consider using social media as their marketing strategy, should improve skills of staff.

It is skeptical whether social media really brings new opportunity for small business and whether customers intend to purchase the services of a company after joining the fansite. In terms of business, it seems to be vague to evaluate.

5.2.3. Target customers of social media

Under perspective of tourism director, was asked what are the target customers that small tourism business can reach through social media, the interviewee recognised customers' age is very important thing. Younger and middle-aged people use information technology, not older people. However, target customers are determined depending on what the company is selling. "...if you are selling group packages for senior citizens, I think that social media is not the best way for marketing" stated interviewee.

5.2.4. Social media site of a tourism company

A company profile is evaluated as one of most important attributes. The information providing on social media sites helps to increase more selling. The interviewee was asked to give opinions about what a tourism company's profile on social media sites should have in order to

attract visitors and to get higher engagement from them. The interviewee's response was dominated by two following suggestions:

In the company's social media site, it should especially have current and topical news and offers. Up-to-date information is welcomed by travellers because it plays as information sources for their travelling plan.

Besides that, packaging is, according to the answer of interviewee, a great way to drive attention of customers towards the company's social media site. Packaging is a concept of services and accommodation combination. For example, the company offers a sale of holiday tour including airfare and hotel accommodation without booking separately from different websites. This is also an effective way to get high possibility of reservation of target customers for those packaging services.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA SUGGESTIONS FOR REPOVESI NATIONAL PARK

6.1. Determining an objective

In any business, a marketing objective plays an important role to outline what is to be accomplished by the company. Setting an objective is to determine an effective marketing strategy which in turn brings the best outcome.

Objectives of using social media might be to build awareness, to increase website visits, to increase ranking on search engine or to attract potential customers. According to analysis on other chapter, I suggest the objectives in the case of Repovesi National Park are improving the local residents' awareness as well as people from other parts of Finland, attracting a stable number of new customers and increasing website traffic.

The reasons of setting those objectives are explained as following:

- Majority of visitors coming to the park are from local municipal and they form as visit groups.
- In order to expand the image of Repovesi National Park, taking care of visitors from different places of Finland is necessary to accomplish.
- Getting new customers to raise the service's sales is important.
- The average age of visitors of Repovesi National Park is less than 41 years which was considered of the group of most savvy social media. (Selby & Petäjistö 2009, 12)

6.2. Proposing appropriate social media tools

The primary research is shown under two different points of view of social media users (also the visitors of Repovesi National Park) and a tourism specialist. The responses of answerers had described the customers' needs and expectations of social media use. Moreover, the expert recommendations helped to choose appropriate social media outlets for Repovesi National Park. Making sure to apply the right social media channels is a decisive factor because not all social media tools are suitable for all business lines, especially in the tourism sector.

The proposed social media tools can be listed as the following table which arrange in order from most to lesser applicable for Repovesi National Park at the present. The list can be change according to the changes of marketing objective and marketing strategy at certain periods.

Table 2. List of social media tools for Repovesi National Park

Social media channels	Description
Facebook http://www.facebook.com/	A social networking site was founded in 2004. It allows people

	to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos. The site has more than 19 million members.
Tripadvisor http://www.tripadvisor.com/	It is the world's largest travel site offering trusted advice from real travellers and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features. The site has more than 35 million unique monthly visitors, 20 million members and over 35 million review and opinions.
Flickr http://www.flickr.com/	The site allows sharing personal photographs and can be used by bloggers and journalist as photo repository. Flickr can be useful for travel marketing exposure.
Wikipedia http://www.wikipedia.org/	Wikipedia is a free encyclopedia that anyone can edit the content. The site attracts nearly 78 million visitors monthly as of January 2010. This site is recommended because it is one of the largest reference websites people come to search for information.
Wikitravel http://wikitravel.org/en/Main_Page	The site was founded in 2003 based on a wiki model providing free worldwide travel guide. The site has 50 000 articles and 50 000 users across 21 language versions till August 2009.
YouTube http://www.youtube.com/	YouTube is the world's most popular online video community,

	allowing millions of people to discover watch and share originally-created videos. This site is suggested because of its play as a distribution platform for content creators and advertisers small and large. Therefore, it would be beneficial for small tourism businesses in marketing.
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An online search on Google was conducted to research whether Repovesi National Park has its official profile or related-upload articles on the above social media channels. The results were shown that the park did have its profile on Facebook and Wikipedia, however very basic information was uploaded. The information of the park on Facebook site is copied the same as on Wikipedia site making no differences and attraction to the audiences. There are only 19 people like the Repovesi National Park's Facebook site. (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Repovesi-National-Park/103128349727840?ref=ts>)

Consequently, the profile of the park should be improved on Facebook and Wikipedia. Writing new related articles in Tripadvisor and uploading photos and videos are being considered as next steps for Repovesi National Park to consider.

6.3. Attracting the fanpage/ visitors and strengthening the social engagement

More fanpage or higher rate of visitors to the social media sites of Repovesi means more people are being interested by the park. It thereby helps to raise the traveller's awareness of Repovesi National Park.

The content on social media sites is requisite for its site traffic increase. From the received answers of the focus group and interview, many opinions are given. The visitors of the park expected to see travelling tips and lots of photos besides basic information and the interviewee mentioned about the packaging tactic. In addition, the social media site of the park should not have old photography and exaggerated text but being a space in which people can freely talk about what they think of Repovesi National Park or even anything about travelling experiences of them.

In my opinion, Repovesi National Park should provide on its official Facebook of online virtual tour which give a lively insight into the park and attract new visitors.

Then I suggest the webpage of Repovesi (<http://www.luontoon.fi/page.asp?Section=5261>) should have the “Share” or “Tweet” which allow readers sharing or tweeting the articles on their own Facebook or Twitter. Conversely, the Facebook site should link to the website of the park. Thus the travellers can access information from different sources.

Strengthening the social engagement of people on the social media sites of the park can be accomplished through different ways. On Facebook, Repovesi National Park may increase the contribution of the visitors by organizing a contest for unprofessional photographers, for instance, with the park-related themes. This not only satisfies members on Facebook with such good photographs but also gives chances for people getting to know about Repovesi National Park. The Repovesi National Park should also create its account on Flickr and upload those received photographs on the site, and direct the link to other social media sites.

Effectively social media is a new way of marketing for small tourism companies. However, it is unable to deny that traditional still plays a very

important role in marketing strategy of a business. Therefore, even making the presence on social media site but Repovesi National Park should connect with schools within the municipal to arrange special tours. For example, every year there are a large number of new students coming to Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences in Kouvola including Finnish students from other cities of Finland and international students from abroad, they all can be the target customers of the park. Moreover, Repovesi National Park can pay attention to open the holiday tour for employees working at companies within the town as a possibility.

Another practical matter is transportation. Repovesi National Park should take into account to organize means of transport from Kouvola centre directly to the park. The more convenient transportation, the higher rate of visitors returning to the park is. A map or any instruction how to get to the park should be printed out as leaflets and expose at the Kouvola central railway station.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In the new era of marketing, social media is increasing very fast. More and more companies, small and large, are heading to social media as a part of their marketing strategy however, not all of them are successful in using this social technology.

The aim of this thesis is to help exploring the reasons of social media is being used in small tourism businesses. It is also to address the opportunities for Repovesi National Park in Kouvola for applying social media in order to achieve its business goals. The research question was, therefore, why social media should be harnessed in small tourism businesses. The question was divided to be studied in two other sub-questions: “How do the social media make significant changes to small tourism enterprises?” and “What are the opportunities for Repovesi National Park in applying social media as effective marketing tool?”

Social media landscape is made up with various platforms of social bookmarking, social media submission sites, media sharing sites, forums and discussion sites, review and rating sites, social networking sites, blogs, podcasts, micro-blogging and wikis. The group of social media users is categorized according to their contribution on the online social community.

Rapidly growing social media have influenced the online consumer behaviour. In particular in tourism, travellers are on their own initiative when coming to information searching and purchase decision-making. In the general view of small businesses, social media is being embraced in relating to marketing and service, consist of identifying and attracting new customers, increasing brand awareness and connecting with customers.

The qualitative research showed the users of social media have not understood these social media channels very well and still restrictive in the use of social media for tourism purposes. The most familiar tool is social networking site Facebook. Some others were mentioned such as Wikipedia, Wikitravel, LonelyPlanet, Twitter and Baidu.

The thesis comes to the conclusion is that the use of social media in small businesses, especially in tourism sector encompassing both advantages and disadvantages. The target customers of social media outlets are determined replying on what kinds of services the tourism companies are offering. However, the young people are considered as the main users of social media channels while old people hesitate to try new technology.

When applying social media in marketing Repovesi National Park there are some recommendations should be considered. Firstly, it has to be setting up an objective for Repovesi what it wants to receive from social media. The objective might consist of increasing the local awareness,

attracting new customers and improving Repovesi's official website traffic.

To benefit the social media outlets with positive return, the key factor is to select the appropriate channels for marketing strategy. Facebook, Tripadvisor, Wikipedia, Wikitravel and YouTube are chosen to apply to Repovesi National Park. The park should also attract more visitors to its social media sites and stimulate their engagement by posting up-to-date information or organizing any online activities for customers.

Besides the leverage of social media tools, other marketing should be utilized: connecting with schools to offer special tours for student's outdoor activities or to offer the holiday trip targeted to employees of companies in Kouvola. It should be advantageous to achieve best of "word-of-mouth" effect which let others spread about Repovesi.

Last but not the least is the means of public transport to the park. The more convenient it is, the more people come to visit Repovesi Park. The direction map or instructions to go to the park should be found easily in the central railway station of Kouvola.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP

Focus group questions

Date: 9 September 2010

Time: 13:45 – 14.10 (25 minutes)

1. What are your ideas about social media?
2. Which social media tools/ social media sites have you used?
3. What are your activities on social networking sites?
4. How often do you visit your favourite social networking site(s)?
5. When choosing a destination to travel, what kinds of information do you want to search on internet?
6. Do you think comments/ reviews of your friends or other people on social media sites affect your travel decision-making? Please specify your reasons.
7. Do you think it is effective to look for travel information in social media sites and why?
8. What are the names of tourism/ travel website have you ever visited?
9. In your opinion, what should be on the Facebook site of a tourism company to attract more fanpage?
10. How do you get to know about Repovesi National Park?

APPENDIX B: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Interview questions

Interviewee: Director of Tourism

Method: Email interview

Date: 3 September 2010

1. As a Director of Tourism, what do you think about small tourism enterprises nowadays come to harness social media in their business?
2. If comparing with traditional marketing, do you find marketing through social media is worth to use?
3. In your opinion, what kinds of social media tools/ social networking sites should be applied in small tourism enterprises?
4. How social media have influence on online customer behaviour?
5. What advantages of social media could bring to a small tourism business?
6. Do you find any drawback of social media tools in the marketing strategy of small business?
7. What are the target customers do you think small tourism businesses can reach through social media?
8. What a social media site of a tourism company should have in order to attract visitors and to get higher engagement?